

Easter 2 2024 TG **SIGHT BEYOND DOUBT** dtw

A priest acquaintance of mine was travelling interstate by 'plane and on his return reflected in a letter to his congregation: 'Perhaps a little jet-setting now and then may be a good way to keep priests in touch with the world. A youngish man sitting near me in the aircraft opened up a lively conversation with an attractive young woman next to him. Relaxing in unobserved anonymity, it was impossible for me not to overhear them; both were widely travelled and enjoyed exchanging impressions and experiences of other countries.

As I listened to their talk of other lands my attention was drawn to the world of magic outside through which we sped. It was sunset above the clouds; a picture of indescribable loveliness, yet one quite unnoticed by our young interpersonal explorers. Enquiries began into the woman's private life. No, she was not married but committed for the time being to the man with whom she lived. Marriage? Important for some, but not for adults keeping their options open. Our young man? He had had liaisons in many countries and was more than available for the night. Was she interested? No. The conversation turned to religion. Did the woman believe in it? A few years ago she had become involved with a fervent evangelical group but they had been too demanding. No, religion didn't figure prominently now. And our male enquirer? He had no time for it. "Seeing is believing", he said, "you can't believe in what you can't see."

Outside the magic was fading as we sped on into the dark. Our young friends had missed that in which they *could* believe and the glimpse it offered of other worlds beyond their pragmatic impermanence and casual rootlessness. Belief, I thought, begins with an act of faith in what one *can* experience – whether relationships, creation, or a sunset. Without that nothing has meaning, and our lives will simply speed on into the dark.' (UNQ)

It is a sobering truth that how you see and what you see determines how and who you will be. Ask yourself: in what ways do I behold the world and people? How do I see things? There are many ways of seeing. There is the greedy eye, the resentful eye, the suspicious eye, the jealous eye, the indifferent eye, the sceptical eye, the loving eye, the discerning eye, the penetrating eye ("she saw right through me"), the compassionate and healing eye. What kind of eye did Jesus have on the world and people, do you think? And what about the eye of the apostle Thomas, who features in today's Gospel? (Jn 20.19-31)

Christ appears to the disciples behind closed doors on the first Easter night. But Thomas isn't there. Later Thomas rejoins them but stubbornly refuses to believe their account of seeing the Lord. It seems that the more they try to convince him, the more Thomas gets worked up, until his protestations are even crude: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark...and my hand in his side, I will not believe". I think Thomas speaks for a lot of people actually; every person with even a slight bit of scepticism who reckons that seeing is believing. Yet Thomas will realise almost straight away that mere physical seeing is no guarantee of believing; it did not constitute a leap of faith any more for him than it would for us. But he could not force himself to believe. He wanted to be convinced beyond doubt that Jesus was somehow really alive. The very fact that he had not been with the disciples earlier may have meant that he was plunged into an even greater spiritual darkness than they were; just needed to be alone...

But now Jesus is present with them. Again, the Christ comes into their midst behind closed doors with familiar yet transformed words “Peace be with you”. Jesus turns specifically to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and place it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Yet Thomas clearly does not take this chance to proof test. He responds with something as far removed from scepticism or proof testing as you can get, “My Lord and my God!” This is no mere physical satisfaction – this is **spiritual conviction!** – Insight beyond all doubt. Here is a person brought into the presence of their very God. Here is a person with eyes wide open – eyes of faith.

A renowned NT theologian, Tom Wright wrote a magisterial book in 2003 *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. In it he is preoccupied with the historical, factual resurrection of Jesus as being the core of Christian belief. But as Matthew eluded on Easter Day, and as Peter Carnley illustrates in a critical examination of Wright in his 2019 *Resurrection in Retrospect*, the Easter experiences are all somewhat more mysterious and revelatory, more appropriated by faith, and less concrete and material, even this one with Thomas. So, I want to suggest to you today, with all possible force, that in the risen Jesus, we are not confined to or by history, or fact or touch; we are released, set free, and empowered by Faith! Indeed, Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of Faith. (Hebs 12.2)

Ask yourself: Do I need a fresh look on life on some issue or someone, that gets to me? Maybe a fresh look at Jesus? What shape is my faith in? At some point in our lives God must become **real** for us, for you and for me, as Jesus did for Thomas. This is why, happily, we can all identify with him. It may be a trauma we overcame, a deep encounter of joy and love, or a quite definite conversion experience. Or perhaps a seemingly hopeless situation cast in a brand-new light. But whatever it was, it made us exclaim, like the big “Aha!”, the big “Wow!”: “My Lord and my God!” This is also the Emmaus story... hearts burn and eyes are opened; the Damascus story too...scales fall off the eyes of a young man named Saul and the rest is Salvation History!

“Falling in love with Love!” This Christ crashes through all the barriers we can ever set up; that’s what Thomas discovered. *Be that Thomas*. When Christ truly comes to you, he can never leave you as you were before. You will see Jesus with different eyes. With this presence, life of a different kind begins. Jesus says, “Peace be with you”, gives you today his Body and his Blood. Do not doubt but believe. Will you discern his real presence? Will you say, “My Lord and my God!” in the Breaking of the Bread?